

Marking 40 years since the Green Party won control of their first Landtag in Baden-Württemberg, we speak to party leader Karl Eberhart about the changes he's seen in Germany since then

*Your first term in power was marked by the decision to rebuilt and rebrand Karlsruhe, what was behind that?*

We came to power amidst a serious, financial crisis, and there was a worry from some businesses that we would be a leftist government, that only knew how to tax the rich instead of rebuilding the economy. This project, which built on Karlsruhe's existing involvement in internet businesses, was a way to attract investment, and at the same time, rebrand the city and area as a centre of Germany's new digital economy. The construction of the new business district was for us a chance to combine economic investment with green principles, building all the offices with solar bricks, which, although ubiquitous now, were brand new at the time. This meant that companies based there had minimal energy costs, so relocating was very attractive, and there was also the unexpected tourist boost it brought. Aesthetically, the way the bricks reflect the sunlight was something we had never considered, but the whole complex made of these bricks is stunning. The name *Krystalstadt* soon followed, and the area is now a major tourist attraction in Southern Germany.

*Green coalitions since then were often focused around grand projects like Karlsruhe, what was behind that?*

We were still new to leading coalitions, and never knew how long it would last, so we wanted to make our mark, especially as the effects of climate change were starting to be felt. With the electrification of the Autobahns in 2025, as well as protecting Mercedes and Volkswagen who were in real trouble from cheap Indian imports (*the Greens were in control of Baden-Württemberg and Niedersachsen at this point*), the policy was to get people to see the benefits again of environmentalism. The electrification was the impetus the industry needed, bosted by advances in 3D printing and inter-company open-source research, to provide clean, cheap cars to Germans, against a backdrop of record petrol prices. The nuclear shutdown in 2022 was so poorly planned for by the Merkel administration, with not enough renewable power-stations built, that we ended up just importing expensive French nuclear power. People's bills shot up, and we weren't even helping the environment, and as a result environmentalism itself was being blamed, so we felt we needed a policy to strike back. The same attitude fired our drive in the 2030's to make Hamburg completely self-sufficient in energy, through rooftop and tidal generators, and removing it from the national grid. Energy prices plummeted in the city, and new business flooded in.

*As a pro-European party, what was your reaction to the reformation of the EU?*

The EU reforms were a complete disaster. Whilst it was clear that such differing economies couldn't keep the same currency without structural changes, the solution led by Horst Seehofer, Merkel's successor, was to centralise European economies by making membership of the Euro

mandatory for continued EU membership and by writing conservative economics into the centralising agreement. This unsurprisingly backfired spectacularly, as we lost key members, such as Britain and Denmark, who refused to adopt the Euro, and Spain and Italy, who refused conservative economics. It also meant Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia dropped their applications to join. Whilst we have managed to adapt the situation for some good, with our Green MEPs pushing through an EU-wide minimum wage last year, there was no reason Eurocentric and conservative dogma had to win over pragmatism and compromise. The EU is a shadow of its former self as a result, and less members means less inter-governmental co-operation, especially on the environment.

*What are the biggest changes in German society you've noticed in the last 40 years?*

A lot of people would argue that technological advances – in transportation, communication, food production etc. – have had the greatest impact, but for me the biggest changes have definitely been social. Germany as a nation has been getting progressively older, and increasingly relying on a migrant workforce's taxes to support itself. With climate change making parts of central Africa uninhabitable, and Britain, Italy and Spain's draconian immigration policies, no longer restricted by EU legal policies and human rights regulations, many migrants fleeing Africa for Europe found Germany the only viable option. This was particularly true for Tanzanians, who had a historical, colonial link with Germany (although maybe not one we're particularly proud of). Millions of Tanzanians came to Germany in the last decade, rebalancing the age demographic, and reshaping the cultural landscape of cities. My flat in Berlin is now surrounded by African grocers and cafes, and the *Kuku Paka* I get from one is absolutely delicious. These have increasingly replaced Turkish grocers and cafes, once everywhere, as the Turkish milieu, in Germany now for almost a century, has largely moved into more middle-class professions and properties in the suburbs.

*What are the biggest challenges for the future?*

I'm the leader of the Greens, so I'll say global warming. We're already seeing disasters around the world, especially for small, island nations, but there are also real problems for Germany too. Some crops in Bavaria have been hit by drought in the last few years, and the North Sea resorts are changing too. My children are very excited that they can now see loggerhead turtles at the beaches in Schleswig-Holstein, but the seals that used to live there have had to flee to colder climates, and there is a genuine fear that resorts like Cuxhaven and Helgoland could be underwater in ten years if continued, concerted action isn't taken. I also think that, despite the retirement age having been moved to 70, and an increasing migrant workforce, we are still facing a massive shortfall in pension and healthcare provisions. These are big problems, I am optimistic there are solutions. Perhaps the first one is getting myself elected to the Bundeskanzleramt next year!